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SUBJECT: FIRE TAKES DOWN KUWAIT INTERNET AND MOBILE SERVICES

¶1. At approximately 2330 on the evening of January 28, a fire broke out on the sixth floor of the telecommunications complex next to Kuwait's Liberation Tower. The fire destroyed most of the equipment of one of Kuwait's three major ISPs. Engineers at the scene shut off power to the adjacent floors to keep the damage contained to the sixth floor. This power shut-off affected almost all of the residential and many of the business Internet connections throughout Kuwait. According to newspaper reports, the fire was caused by a short circuit in a power supply for the building's computer systems.

¶2. Most Embassy employees and other contacts throughout the country reported being without Internet connectivity throughout most of the morning of the 29th. The fire also affected some mobile telecommunications services, causing busy circuits throughout the morning of the 29th. A few firemen were treated for smoke inhalation, but Econ Officer was told by various contacts that no one was injured in the fire itself. FastTelco, headquartered on the floor where the fire started and one of the leading ISPs in Kuwait, lost over 85% of its equipment. The Embassy was notified by fax that our Internet connectivity had been briefly disrupted shortly after the fire broke out.

¶3. Comment: While Kuwait has grand plans for investing in and developing its telecommunications infrastructure, this fire, the extent of the damage, the lack of redundancy in the system, and the widespread outages all demonstrate that Kuwait has a way to go in improving its telecom and network infrastructure. It also highlights the vulnerabilities in Kuwait's aging communications infrastructure. End Comment.

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